

Making sense of immunization science:

The genesis and evolution of the National Network for Immunization Information

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Background: In 1999, a group of nationally-recognized physicians recognized the changing landscape of the immunization information environment. The mobilization of activist groups and the resulting media coverage increased the equivocality of mediated immunization information. Acknowledging vaccination rate decreases in other countries and policymakers' attention to activists domestically, the physician group collaborated to form the National Network for Immunization Information (NNii) as a communication strategy to prevent immunization rate decreases. For ten years, the organization has pursued its goal to "provide the public, health professionals, policy makers, and the media with up-to-date, scientifically valid information related to immunizations to help them understand the issues and to make informed decisions."

Objectives: This investigation purposed to provide a critical evaluation of the strategic communication planning and implementation of NNii from conception to present day. As NNii formed and adapted as an organization and as a communicator, Weick's model of organizing provides a descriptive framework and analytical guide.

Methods: The study uses a case study methodology, developing a systematic analysis of organizational documents, the media environment, and in-depth interviews by applying the model of organizing as an interpretive framework. Specifically, this study adopts the explanation building analytic technique. Investigators conducted 11 interviews, including NNii past steering committee members, communication consultants, and journalists.

Iterative data analysis included open coding, axial coding, and thematic saturation. Themes were compared to study propositions and research questions.

Results: Major themes identified included the organization's informative nature, funding credibility, non-branding, reflective evaluation, collaborative partnerships, and media strategy.

Conclusions: NNii meets the requirements of requisite variety, nonsummativity, and organizational flexibility proposed by Weick's model of organizing. However, a lack of systematic evaluation of organization goals prevents it from adapting communication tactics and strategies.

Additionally, the authors recommend that NNii, though informative in intent, adopt persuasive strategies to attract and retain the attention of its target audiences.

FORMATIVE EVALUATION

	Theme	Explanation	Example
Situation Analysis	Preemptive campaign	NNii wanted to get ahead of the potential problem of not vaccinating by focusing on changing the misinformation rather than changing any behavior.	"[We wanted to] preempt the unnecessary negative media coverage and perhaps even heading off bad public policy" "We were very concerned with inappropriate misinformation that was being disseminated"
	Vaccine hesitant	NNii focused on the parents who were potentially hesitant to vaccinate their children, not anti-vaccine activists.	"Most parents are 'vaccine-hesitant'—people who are confused by the various messages they are hearing." "We were deciding to communicate with a highly educated audience... highly educated parents with no experience with these disease may have a solid understanding with the way the science works and are likely to research ideas themselves."
Publics Analysis	Barriers to audience understanding	NNii found that audiences were unable to understand who was a credible source and understand the information from the science community.	"When the did these studies, the conclusions would have to be translated to understand. They were all in this convoluted language." "By and large, we are not a very scientifically literate population."
	Consumer model of healthcare	NNii found that parents were taking a more consumer role in healthcare rather than completely adhering to what their pediatrician recommendations.	"The major issue is parents picking and choosing the immunizations or negotiating the immunization schedule."

STRATEGY

Theme	Explanation	Example
Information not advocacy	NNii wanted to inform their audience rather than advocate for vaccines.	"We stuck to strict rules from the beginning. NNii was an information entity not an advocacy entity."
Independent nature	NNii felt their credibility was dependent on source of income, continued to pursue funding independent of pharmaceutical industry and government.	"We wanted to keep reminding people that we were not affiliated with the CDC because there was an automatic distrust of the government." "I certainly understand that we need to be as transparent and as unaffiliated as possible."
Audience-centered	NNii wanted to produce information that was clear to all four audiences.	"We wanted to reach all of those audiences in a way that somebody could quickly go and find out [vaccine information] in a language that was readily accessible."
Science-based	NNii wanted information to be science based unlike many anti-vaccine campaigns.	"Anything we publish is reviewed by experts then by lay people such as parents and grandparents."

TACTICS

Theme	Explanation	Example
Media coverage	NNii wanted to counter the incorrect human interest stories back to the scientific facts.	"The media was covering it in a way that was not science based and there was a lot of concern about the impact."
Website	NNii wanted to give information seekers comprehensive research regardless of medical knowledge.	"The public, the website was a direct route to them and indirect to the media."
Publications	NNii, as a strategy of transparency, pursues publication in peer-reviewed journals and books.	"In the long run, something like the book [Myers & Pineda, 2008] may have a longer term effect than [committee member] talking on the television." "This was a transparent communication initiative unlike others who might have kept findings to themselves."